

bird was watched bouncing up and down on a branch of a small tree next the river soliciting food.

Kingfisher activity continued during autumn and winter 1998 and another interesting display took place on 2nd October, when the presence of a remarkable dark grey heron on the river in the early morning, caused alarm and considerable vocal display from at least two kingfisher.

Kingfisher activity is not at the level of the early 1990s on the Kelvin but they maintain a presence and appear once more to be consolidating their territory about Kelvingrove. An interesting aspect of their activities is the interest they have generated in park workers and "hangers-on" about the west section of Kelvingrove. On several occasions small "social" groups gathered by the River Kelvin below Gilmorehill to see if they might see the kingfisher. On being questioned all were interested, helpful and knowledgeable about local park and river birdlife and happy to share their observations.

### **Great Spotted Woodpecker in Kelvingrove**

Brian S. Skillen

46 Munro Road, Jordanhill, Glasgow G13 1SF.

On Friday the 13th. March 1998 a Great Spotted Woodpecker was encountered in Kelvingrove Park about 07.40. A well marked male bird was watched for 20 minutes exploring and drumming about an ailing Willow tree close to the pedestrian bridge, on the bandstand side of the park. The bird was encountered again on the 20th. and watched in flight towards the Lord Robert's statue high on the hill above the park; it was heard but not seen on the 24th.

The bird was not encountered again until the 7th April when it was found working a tree close to the Kennedy statue of the Lioness and her cubs. The woodpecker was busy on a birch on the tree side and it kept working at it for a period until it stopped to preen. Preening was stopped after a period as the bird took alarm at other people in the park and the presence of other birds.

The woodpecker was encountered again on the morning of 16th. April busy preening, high on a tree in direct sunlight: after a time it flew to the Kennedy statue site. When watched at the Kennedy site the bird was knocking on the same area of the tree as noted above and dodging round and round the trunk, stopping and pressing against the bark as if listening. At this site the bird was regularly mobbed by blue tits.

The woodpecker was seen again on the 22nd. April at a perch site above the skateboard area of the park, where it was drumming against an upright stick branch, high in the tree. The bird was very jittery indeed and though it stopped to preen a careful watch was maintained at all times.

On the morning of the 23rd. the woodpecker was heard as if in the distance but lunchtime investigation revealed the reason for the odd beating note, for it was found starting a hole about 4 metres up the first tree on which it was sighted. The woodpecker was already able to get two thirds of its body into the hole suggesting that it had been busy for quite some period and accounting for the caution of the previous sightings. The woodpecker was watched from cover working the nest hole over several days and its pecking into the tree hole, then extracting its head to shake off saw-dust, was interesting to see.

On the 24th. another woodpecker appeared on site and the two birds indulged in their "tchicking" call and display for about 15 minutes.

Discussion with other people in the park suggested that the woodpeckers were ranging as far as Queen Margaret Bridge and generally very active, though not always seen. A possible reason for this was the woodpecker's obvious alarm at the presence of other birds such as magpie. On arrival of a magpie a woodpecker working at the tree hole was seen to cling in tightly to the tree trunk and remain static for a timed 10 minutes, after which time the magpie had flown off. Tree cutting activity from the 24th. April onward was another reason for increasing alarm for the woodpecker, but by the 25th. the woodpecker active at the tree hole were well in on the nest. All that might be seen on occasion was a tail, angled as the bird held its hammering and gouging position against the trunk.

The Kelvingrove encounters continued throughout April and into May with both woodpeckers being seen. The birds were regularly mobbed by other parkland birds, such as a mistle thrush on the 27th April. On the 1st. May there was an encounter between a woodpecker and a heron which caused great alarm to the former. On the 5th. May a small flock of starlings harried a woodpecker away from a perch site close to the south gate of Kelvingrove. Problems with other birds and a period of tree cutting in Kelvingrove led to the woodpecker "deserting" the tree hole in the park and a long period of their not being seen. But there was a reason for this and successful nesting somewhere in the valley of the Kelvin led to an encounter on the 25th. June with the two adult woodpeckers and a young bird, near the Carlyle Statue in Kelvingrove. Throughout late June and into early July all three birds were encountered at various locations throughout the parkland.

An interesting sighting of the young woodpecker was had on the 1st. July when it was watched working a tree branch low down. It is likely that the young bird found it easier to work along the branch for with its shorter juvenile tail the speedy movements up tree trunks achieved by the adults would have been difficult. That the length of the tail dictated the young woodpecker's activities at low levels on tree branches is supported by never having seen the young woodpecker active on tree trunks, unlike the adults which could literally run up them. The shorter beak of the young woodpecker probably also accounted for its actions as the pronounced grooves and openings of the branch bark surface was more favourable to the young bird's probing beak and long tongue.

Woodpecker activity greatly reduced after July 1998 concomitant with an increase in troublesome magpie and grey squirrel. Adult greys were seen to chase the woodpecker in July where young squirrel were present in the thickets at tree bases where the woodpecker chose to land. A most unusual encounter between woodpecker and squirrel took place on one of the formers' "sentry trees" in which a juvenile squirrel had established. The grey squirrel spent much of its time tree hanging below the trunks of branches and wandering around in below the trunks of the branches to the seeming bewilderment of the woodpecker which scolded at it whenever it came near. Late season sightings included activity in September and November, the latter again of some interest as the bark structure of trees seemed so soft after the wet summer, that woodpeckers pecking on the trunks made no noise at all and were only spotted by their drumming head movements. Indeed tree bark was so weak that the woodpecker was able to lever off great

strips with its beak and send the bark flying everywhere.

The woodpeckers were not seen by this observer after early November 1998 and it is likely they disappeared with colder weather. Exploration through Kelvingrove after November no longer revealed fresh "beak-work" an element to their discovery again in mid-autumn.

Approximately 10 hours or more of viewing woodpeckers was achieved in Kelvingrove, a parkland where the woodpeckers seem to have been little recorded before and 1998 was therefore a significant year for parkland bird life.

I acknowledge my mother, Carol Aitken, Sheila Russell and Richard Sutcliffe for assistance in recording the activities of the Great Spotted Woodpecker in Kelvingrove.

### **Sperm Whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*) in Scapa Flow, Orkney**

C.J. Booth

34 High Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1AZ

The Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* was rare in Orkney waters in the 19th century according to Buckley and Harvie-Brown (1891). It continued to be rare in the 20th century up until 1975, with only one definite record (Booth and Booth, 1994). Since then it has occurred more frequently with a number of both sightings and strandings, although some of the latter are of whales that have been dead for some time before coming ashore on Orkney. The majority of sightings have come from within Scapa Flow, an area of sheltered water well known as an anchorage for naval vessels in both First and Second World Wars and now used by oil tankers. Lying in the southern part of the Orkney archipelago, Scapa Flow extends for approximately 120 square miles, it has a maximum depth of 62 metres and a mean depth of approximately 35 metres.

The first report was in October 1976 when 6 or 7 whales were seen on several occasions, during one day, from an aircraft that was making flights across the Flow. The next sighting was again from an aircraft when a large whale, about 18 metres in length, was seen on 22nd September 1981; it was present for only a few hours. On 22nd February 1993, 6 whales arrived and stayed for several weeks. They were all thought to be immature males, 4 being about 15 metres in length and 2 slightly smaller. The whales spent their time within the deeper waters of the Flow, often resting with parts of their heads protruding above the water. From a distance they looked like large barrels floating on the surface of the sea. Their continued presence in the Flow became a cause for concern. Not only was there a risk of collision with shipping but also of accidental stranding. On 25th March a successful operation was launched, using a flotilla of boats to shepherd the whales out of Scapa Flow and into the Pentland Firth.

There were no more reports until 1998 when 7 were seen on 14th April. Varying in length between 11 and 15 metres, these were also thought to be immature males. They were still present on the 15th, so an attempt was made to monitor their movements. Unfortunately strong winds during the next few days made it very difficult to keep track of the whales, with even the sheltered waters of the Flow being rough. The last definite sighting was on the morning of the 21st April but it was not until the 24th that conditions were calm enough to carry out an aerial survey to confirm that the whales had left. It will be

interesting to see whether Scapa Flow has any further visits from Sperm Whales in the next few years.

### **References**

- Booth, C. and Booth, J. (1994). *The Mammals of Orkney*. Kirkwall.  
Buckley, T.E. and Harvie-Brown, J.A. (1891). *A Vertebrate Fauna of the Orkney Islands*. Edinburgh.

### **An Otter at Cadder**

Brian S. Skillen

46 Munro Road, Jordanhill, Glasgow G13 1SF

On the 28th. March 1998 I encountered an otter in the area of the old Roman Fort at Cadder. The otter was first seen on the opposite bank of the canal where it travelled about 50 metres, stopping and exploring parts of the bank and then hurrying on. It entered the canal eventually and surface swam out into the middle of the canal: to my surprise the otter swam towards me. I stopped walking along the canal bank and the otter landed and came up onto the bank about 4 metres from me and reared up, looking at me. It maintained this pose and sniffed the air. It did not appear to be put out by my presence, though it made a "chirping" noise. The otter then sat back down and stopped and continued looking in my direction. Eventually it sniffed the air again and after a soft whistle, it wandered past me and into the cover of grass and plantings. The encounter lasted ten minutes or more. At Cadder Fort the canal follows a course along the bank of the hill with a very steep descent to open farmland running across to the River Kelvin; it was later possible to watch the otter travel across the farmland to the Kelvin, going about its business.

Don Martin, Reference and Information Librarian for East Dunbartonshire Leisure & Cultural Services, reported seeing an otter on the Kelvin, about the Park Burn, Kirkintilloch, a week or so previous to my encounter and it may have been the same animal.

The otter was classical in appearance conforming in its general behaviour to the description available in texts such as Southern's "The handbook of British mammals" (1964). What was impressive was the otter's acceptance of my presence which was quite at variance to ill-tempered encounters with mink along the canal and in truth I was taken totally aback with this close encounter with an otter.

### **Parkland change and its impact on Grey Squirrel life in Kelvingrove**

Brian S. Skillen

46 Munro Road, Jordanhill, Glasgow G13 1SF

The cutting down of trees and cover in Kelvingrove as part of attempts to rehabilitate the old park impacted on local life for squirrels. In June 1998 after several "clan" groups of